

Developers may go slow on going green

by Gan Pei Ling - 18 Feb 2015 05:00 PM



KUALA LUMPUR: With the country's economy and property sector expected to face headwinds this year, developers are expected to ease up on getting their property development green-certified as part of efforts to contain costs.

Green Building Index (GBI) Accreditation Panel chairman Von Kok Leong expects GBI's sharp growth trajectory over the past five years to slow down this year. "There might be fewer new projects registering with us but we will be ramping up our efforts to get existing buildings certified instead," he tells FocusM.

Von adds that the bulk of building stocks in Malaysia are existing buildings and most of them have yet to be certified. The Petronas Twin Towers and Petronas Tower 3, for example, are among prominent existing buildings that are in the process of seeking GBI certification.

The number of projects, particularly residential and commercial properties, going for GBI certification has grown exponentially to 601 since 2009. Most of these certified projects are concentrated in the Klang Valley but Von says Penang, Iskandar Malaysia in Johor and other prime urban areas in the country are catching up.

Green building certification has become increasingly popular in Malaysia since the introduction of GBI in 2009 and another local green building rating tool called Green Real Estate (GreenRE) in 2013.

GreenRE executive director James Chua believes developers would still be keen to adopt "passive design features" that would not incur additional construction cost.

"Simple things like adopting a north-south orientation, having air wells and high ceilings help to cool our buildings naturally without incurring huge cost," says Chua, who works without air-conditioning at his office in Wisma Rehda.

In reality, while passive design features may help developers to achieve basic certified status, they would still need to invest additional capital to install features such as more energy-efficient air-conditioning, lighting, rainwater harvesting system and solar panels.

As such, Von reveals that GBI has been lobbying the federal government to extend the tax exemption to GBI-certified projects for another five years.

Developers whose projects have been certified by GBI between 2009 and last year enjoyed tax exemption for the additional capital expenditure they incurred to install eco-friendly features. "We're still waiting to hear from Kettha [Energy, Green Technology

and Water Ministry] and the Finance Ministry," he says.

On the other hand, Chua says GreenRE is not lobbying the government for tax exemption for GreenRE - certified projects.

"We believe it is the developer's social responsibility to go green for our future generation's sake, plus adopting passive design does not add much to cost."

GreenRE is adopted from Singapore's Building Construction Authority's (BCA) Green Mark scheme Version 2 for new residential and non-residential as well as existing buildings. BCA has since introduced revisions that GreenRE has yet to adopt.

Chua says Rehda decided to adopt an earlier version of Green Mark to allow for easier compliance by local developers.

GreenRE has yet to be recognised by the Malaysia Green Building Confederation (MGBC), which recognises only GBI. Chua says GreenRE is working to gain direct recognition from the World Green Building Council this year.

GBI was developed specifically for Malaysia by the Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) and Association of Consulting Engineers Malaysia (ACEM).

"Indonesia and Brunei have wanted to adopt GBI but we told them it's better for them to develop their own tools that suit their own country best," explains Von, a former president of MGBC.

He adds that GBI has worked with its Indonesian and Brunei counterparts to train their architects and engineers to develop their own green building rating tools. Apart from Singapore which introduced Green Mark a decade ago, Von says Malaysia is seen as a leader in the green building industry in Southeast Asia.

Despite the growing awareness of sustainability, Chua believes the construction industry in Malaysia is not going green fast enough to deal with the threats of climate change, urban pollution and the burden of overconsumption on our natural resources.

"We'll be holding more seminars and road shows to educate the public, developers and other stakeholders," he says.

Similarly, Von says GBI will continue to engage with colleges, universities and local, state and federal authorities to raise environmental consciousness.

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